

POLICE/SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT		GENERAL ORDERS	
SUBJECT: Alarms		NUMBER: 2-13	
EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 1999		REVIEW DATE:	
AMENDS/SUPERSEDES: GO 2-13, January 1988		APPROVED: _____ Chief of Police/Sheriff	
CALEA STANDARDS: 81.2.13		VLEPSC STANDARDS: ADM.24.02, OPR.01.01	

NOTE

This order is for internal use only, and does not enlarge an officer's civil or criminal liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third-party claims. Violations of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

INDEX WORDS

Alarms
Dispatcher's responsibilities (re: alarms)
False-alarm coordinator

I. POLICY

Alarms are a means of notifying the local law-enforcement agency that a serious crime may be in progress when the use of a telephone is impractical or impossible. Despite the frequency of false alarms, verified alarms represent a threat to citizens and law-enforcement officers and therefore require an organized, cautious response. Officers shall proceed with extreme caution when answering any type of alarm call. Officers shall be aware that alarms can be activated in a number of ways, the nature of the alarm sometimes determining the response. The town/county has a false alarm ordinance which the department observes. The false-alarm coordinator monitors alarm response and works to reduce false alarms.

II. PURPOSE

To outline a plan to be followed in response to activated alarms which promotes officer safety.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Alarm

A device or series of devices including, but not limited to, systems interconnected with radio frequency signals and which are designed to emit or transmit an audible, visual, or electronic signal upon activation.

1. Dispatch learns of activated alarms through several means. Most are transmitted directly to dispatch by automatic dialing devices from homes or businesses which transmit a message to non-emergency lines.
2. Citizens may observe or hear an alarm and personally report it.
3. Officers may discover and report alarms during their patrols. Dispatch shall classify alarms as follows:
 - a. Unknown alarm.
 - b. Financial institution burglary or robbery alarms.
 - c. Commercial burglary or robbery alarms.
 - d. Domestic violence alarm.
 - e. Residential burglary or panic alarms.
 - f. School alarm.

B. False-alarm coordinator

The employee responsible for monitoring compliance with the town's/county's false alarm ordinance by security alarm users.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. General dispatch responsibilities

1. For all alarms, dispatchers shall assign officers to respond according to the priority appropriate to the circumstances and nature of the alarm. If the alarm company advises that they have confirmed with the protected premises that a crime has occurred, the dispatcher shall treat the event as a robbery or burglary and assign officers accordingly.
2. The dispatcher shall immediately begin and maintain telephone contact with the business (if during working hours) or home until the responding officer advises the dispatcher that the alarm was false. In case of a robbery alarm at a financial institution, the dispatcher shall not contact the business to verify the alarm until officers are in position near the premises and the primary officer or supervisor has directed the dispatcher to make the call. If a verified

alarm, dispatchers shall obtain a description of the suspects, whether suspects are still at or near the scene, or their direction and mode of travel, time elapsed, and a description of an escape vehicle.

3. If the telephone call goes unanswered, responding units shall be so advised.

B. General patrol responsibilities

1. When an alarm signal is received, two units shall be dispatched (one closest to the scene and a backup) immediately to the alarm location. If available, other units will proceed to the location, and stand by while maintaining radio silence, unless another emergency exists.
2. If units are dispatched to a robbery or burglary alarm a considerable distance away, the siren and emergency lights may be used, but the siren should be turned off within hearing distance from the location of the alarm. An emergency response is authorized per GO 2-9. Officers are to respond sensibly and cautiously when using emergency equipment. **Audible alarms, however, do not justify an emergency response. Officers shall respond to audible alarms according to posted speed limits and traffic control devices.**
3. The first unit to arrive at the alarm scene shall approach the premises cautiously, being observant for possible getaway cars, lookouts, or other suspicious signs. Before arrival, responding units shall, by dispatcher assignment or prearranged agreement, know which unit will cover the front and which will cover the rear. The first unit shall assume a position to cover the entrance without being seen from the inside, unless it has been determined that suspects have already fled the scene. Suspects leaving the building should not be able to see police vehicles.
4. The second unit to arrive at the scene shall assume a position which covers the second most likely exit without being seen from the inside, unless it has been determined that suspects have already fled the scene.
5. In the case of a verified alarm, other patrol units shall be directed by the on-duty supervisor to monitor possible escape routes or resume other duties.
6. Upon arrival at an alarm incident, if officers confirm that a burglary or robbery has occurred, they will write a report with an appropriate classification.
7. If officers find that the alarm was activated in the absence of suspicious activity or due to user error, the town/county false-alarm ordinance requires them to leave on the premises a written notice that specifies the date and time

of the alarm response, the officer's name and business telephone number, and a copy of the summary of the alarm ordinance.

C. Bank alarms

1. Dispatchers shall not attempt to contact the institution to determine the validity of the alarm until officers are in position near the premises.
2. If the dispatcher learns that the alarm is false, he or she must verify the false status with a key employee and request the employee to exit the business to meet the responding officers (and show appropriate identification).
3. The on-duty supervisor shall direct units to assume a perimeter around the premises, if possible. If no notice of a false alarm has been received, the primary unit or the supervisor shall determine whether the dispatcher shall telephone the business. If the call is unanswered or a questionable response is provided, officers shall assume that a possible robbery is in progress.
4. If no bank officer approaches in a reasonable time and the dispatcher has telephone contact with the bank, then officers shall consider the alarm to be a robbery in progress. In this event, the on-duty supervisor or primary officer may consider the possibility of hostage taking within the business and may request a tactical unit.
5. If the on-scene supervisor or primary officer determines that the alarm is false, he or she shall not rely solely on the teller or a bank official saying so, but must enter the bank with the bank officer to verify the situation and so notify dispatch.
6. If a robbery has been committed, the primary officer shall identify witnesses, ensure that injured people receive medical attention, protect the crime scene, and obtain necessary information for be-on-the-lookout broadcasts.

D. Business alarms

1. If the business is closed, the dispatcher shall immediately notify the owner or other person on the call list.
2. Officers shall enter a business showing no physical signs of break-in only after the owner arrives. Officers shall conduct a complete, thorough search of the premises.
3. If officers discover physical signs of a break-in, they shall assume that a suspect or suspects may be inside the business. Officers shall consider the possibility that hostages have been taken. If appropriate, officers shall

summon a canine unit. In any event, officers shall conduct a thorough search of the premises.

E. Residential alarms

1. Officers summoned to a residential alarm shall first try to contact the owner or person left in charge of the residence before entering.
2. Officers shall thoroughly search the premises accompanied by the owner or person left in charge.
3. If officers discover signs of a forced entry, then they shall search the premises unescorted. A canine unit may be summoned, if available.
4. Some residential alarms may be panic or domestic violence alarms. These alarms require the same expeditious and cautious approach as other types. If a domestic violence alarm, dispatch shall attempt to determine the existence of any preliminary or emergency protective orders in effect and so advise officers before their arrival (see GO 2-32 for guidance on responding to domestic violence calls).

F. Robbery/burglary

1. If a robbery or burglary has taken place and dispatch has the victim or reportee on the telephone, dispatch shall obtain any available information about the suspect's description, mode and direction of travel, and shall advise the business or home to keep everyone out except police personnel. If a financial institution has been the victim of a robbery, observe the procedures described under IV.C above.
2. Secure crime scene and all physical evidence and summon appropriate personnel; see GO 2-14, Investigations.

G. False alarms

1. If responding officers determine the situation to be a false alarm, they shall so advise the dispatcher by telephone or radio.
2. The false-alarm coordinator shall confer with businesses showing repeated false alarms in order to curb the problem. By town/county ordinance, all alarm companies must have a permit to operate. The coordinator shall review false alarm calls periodically to recommend revocation of permits if necessary. The coordinator shall initiate all correspondence with businesses as required by the ordinance. The chief of police/sheriff functions as a hearing officer in the event of an appeal by a business or private person of a revoked permit, as outlined in the ordinance.

[The Department of Criminal Justice Services has a model alarm ordinance. For information on this ordinance, contact the Private Security Section, 804-786-6344.]

H. Crime prevention

1. Officers shall provide financial institutions, commercial businesses, and private citizens guidance on handling verified alarms representing crimes in progress or crimes that just occurred. Specific topics on which employees shall receive a briefing include:
 - a. Employees' responsibilities for protecting their safety and the safety of their patrons.
 - b. How to use decoy money and explosive money packages.
 - c. Tips to avoid hostage taking and on appropriate behavior if taken hostage.
 - d. The use of signals or placards when approaching officers.
 - e. Protection of evidence.